



Louis H. Bruni
County Judge

1000 Houston St. 3rd Floor
Laredo, Texas 78040

(956) 523-4600
Fax (956) 523-5065

WEBB COUNTY PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Raul Casso
(956) 523-4600

JUDGE BRUNI SAYS STATE BUDGET CUTS REQUIRE WEBB COUNTY TO SEARCH FOR NEW REVENUES; MAINTAINS FIFTH BRIDGE IS BEST LONG-TERM OPTION TO AVOID NEW TAXES

LAREDO – During today's meeting of the Webb County Commissioners' Court, Webb County Judge Louis Bruni said state budget cuts will have a devastating impact on Webb County's finances, forcing the county to find additional sources of revenue to make up for the cuts or face additional taxes. Bruni said after much thought and consideration, he believes the county should continue pursuing the proposed fifth international bridge to ensure long-term revenues flow into the county.

"As I mentioned at our last Commissioners' Court meeting, I have been very concerned about the budget news coming out of Austin," said Bruni. "Since that time, I have had conversations with our legislative representatives about the impact of likely budget cuts on Webb County.

"The news is frightening," said Bruni.

Bruni said Webb County can expect to lose between \$55 million and \$70 million over the next two years from cuts in the Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program or CHIP. That means that some 5,000-8,000 people in Webb County will lose their Medicaid or CHIP coverage, plus another 5,000 or 6,000 people will lose their prescription coverage, according to the Center for Public Policy Priorities, an Austin think tank.

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Webb County Needs Fifth Bridge

Add One

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“This paints a very grim reality for Webb County in the coming years,” said Bruni. “As a county, we cannot turn our backs on these needy families – instead, we must find a way to continue providing indigent health care services to the thousands of families who are losing their coverage.”

Bruni noted that in addition to the cuts in health care, the state also is making dramatic cuts to public safety funds and other programs, putting a lot of additional pressure on other parts of Webb County’s budget.

“As leaders of this county, we are faced with three choices: 1) cut services, even though more people need them; 2) raise taxes, even though many Webb County families are already struggling to make ends meet; or, 3) look for new, long-term sources of revenue so we can continue to provide needed services to Webb County families without having to raise taxes,” said Bruni. “Given the seriousness of what lies just over the horizon for our county, I believe the commissioners’ court must look for a new, long-term source of revenue.”

“To me, that source is obvious,” said Bruni. “Webb County must continue pursuing a fifth international bridge, to tap into both the growing trade with our neighbors in Mexico and a long-term revenue stream that will support valuable services for the families of Webb County without having to raise taxes on our citizens.”

“I realize the fifth bridge will not bring an immediate solution to the current budget problems, but in the future if we have problems like these – and we will – the fifth bridge will help ensure we have the resources we need to provide vital services for the families of Webb County,” said Bruni.

Bruni added that discussions with the City of Laredo so far have proven unfruitful and given the urgency of the situation, the county is now prepared to pursue the fifth bridge on its own, if necessary.

Commissioners Judith Gutierrez and Jerry Vasquez will travel to Saltillo, Mexico for a presentation tomorrow to provide an update on the proposed fifth bridge to the Binational Meeting on Bridges and Border Crossings, a semi-annual meeting between the U.S. Department of State and Mexico’s Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores.

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